



For immediate release: Feb. 26, 2018

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WSDA prepared to enforce Brassica seed regulations

OLYMPIA – [The Washington State Department of Agriculture](#) (WSDA) is prepared to pursue legal action against Brassica seed growers who do not coordinate their growing locations with other growers. This has become an ongoing problem, especially in northwestern Washington counties, and is placing commercial seed growers at risk of cross-pollination, potentially reducing the value of their crops.

WSDA is responsible for enforcing state law to protect commercially grown seed crops from cross-pollination. Brassica growers in certain parts of the state are required to participate in a cooperative program to coordinate their growing locations that prevents cross-pollination.

Prior to the 2017 planting season, WSDA mounted an education and outreach campaign to discourage Brassica cross-pollination in the northwestern counties of the state. This included sharing information through social media, distributing postcards and talking directly to area growers.

“Growers who let their plants bloom and go to seed without taking part in this process threaten the viability of an important state seed production industry,” WSDA Director Derek Sandison said. “WSDA intends to partner with Brassica seed growers to seek injunctions against violators.”

Seed production is an important industry for Washington’s economy and for world food supply. One-quarter of the world’s cabbage seed, for example, comes from Western Washington.

Common names for plants in the Brassica family include cabbage, kale, broccoli, kohlrabi, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, mustard, turnip and pak choi. More than 15 species of Brassica vegetable seed crops are grown in Washington state.

When open-pollinated crops like Brassica species are allowed to bolt, flower and go to seed, they can spread pollen to neighboring fields and farms, contaminating other Brassica seed crops. [Washington State University \(WSU\) Extension of Skagit County](#), which monitors Brassica crops, estimates that for the 2017 crop year, unpinned Brassica crops caused approximately \$1 million of damage in lost seed crops.

WSDA regulations require Brassica seed growers to participate in events that identify – or “pin” - their crop locations on a map. This applies to seed savers as well.

Pinning the locations of cross-pollinated seed crops, which started in Washington state in the 1940s, brings together seed crop growers to mutually map out where crops will be planted with the goal of preventing

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unwanted cross-pollination. At a minimum, state rules require a two-mile distance between Brassica plantings of the same species, and a greater distance for certain species.

In Western Washington, the next pinning days are scheduled for March 1 and June 1 at the [WSU Mount Vernon Research and Extension Center](#).

“This time-honored tradition of agricultural cooperation keeps intact the reputation of our state’s seed industry as high quality, safe, and productive,” Sandison said.

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